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To
Ross's
Summit

Dear Abby: I ...

respond to the letter from "Tacoma Mom," who complained that her ex-husband didn't want to take their 6-year-old to his swimming lesson during his regularly scheduled Wednesday-night visit.

I, too, am a divorced mother who is happily

remarried. Unlike "Tacoma Mom," I do not wish to control every moment of my daughter's time with her father. Watching the children participate in a sport does not allow the quality time divorced parents should have.

Everyone talks about the importance of a father's role in a child's life. Does that apply only if he follows the schedule given to him by the mother? I am sure that when the family was intact, "Tacoma Mom" didn't tell the father how to spend his time with his son.

After a divorce, people are consumed by hurt and anger. Children are too often caught in the middle and used as a way of "getting back" at each other.

While I agree that the Tacoma father should be involved in the child's activities, divorced fathers need time with their children on their

relationship; I believe her father is entitled to one, too. She and her father do things that I don't do — fish, camp, work on cars. She has two very different and fulfilling lives. That is what keeps her well-adjusted. Her father and I have developed a healthy relationship where our daughter is concerned. We always keep HER best interests in mind.

Abby, shouldn't a mother consult the father before signing up the children for activities that interfere with his time? They are his children, too. Or is this just a power struggle of a bitter woman?

—A Ma in Pa.

Dear Ma: I commend you and your ex-husband for putting your daughter's best interests first.

I have received stacks of letters regarding "Tacoma Mom." Most readers felt that there should be a compromise. They suggested that Dad should have an additional day of visitation with an activity that he has planned — or just some alone time. More compromise and less "control" would be a healthy solution.

Dear Abby: My best friend asked me who I liked. I told her, trusting that she wouldn't tell

to get the guy I like to ask her out. The worst part is, she doesn't even like this guy and she's moving away. What should I do? Help!

—Mad in Leesburg, Va.

Dear Mad: The first thing you should do is recognize that your "best friend" can't keep a secret, and is a troublemaker on top of it. Do not confide in her again.

And second, don't give up hope. Your rival is moving away, and the field will soon be open for you again.

Dear Abby: My daughter is having her marriage blessed next week. After the blessing, she is to have a dinner party for about 50 people. Most of them were at her wedding, which took place five years ago.

I am unsure about giving gifts. Should we bring a gift, and if so, what kind of gift should it be? Thank you.

—Puzzled in Rhode Island

Dear Puzzled: Give her a token gift for the happy occasion — a lovely picture frame, a candy dish or a crystal jam jar.

Dear Abby is written by Pauline Phillips and daughter Jeanne Phillips.

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by Maureen Vander Schaaf

For Parenting and Family Life

Your medicine cabinet may be well stocked — but what happens when you drive away? "Be prepared to treat troubles on the go by keeping first-aid supplies in your car," says Kathy Haley, trauma program manager at Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. Her essentials:

- blanket
- flashlight, in case of nighttime injury
- antibacterial cleansing gel (available in drugstores) to clean your hands before treating a wound
- chemical ice packs, available at drugstores (watch expiration date)
- small bottle of water to rinse off abrasions
- antiseptic wipes (for disinfection)
- gauze pads (for cuts, scrapes)
- scissors to cut gauze or bandage to the size needed
- non-allergenic adhesive tape, to secure the bandage
- tweezers to remove splinters
- acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- adhesive bandage strips (in a variety of sizes)
- a distraction for a child in pain — perhaps a cheap but never-before-seen toy.

"Aside from this basic gear," says Haley, "be sure to keep change for phone calls; a paper and pencil for writing down instructions; and a card listing phone numbers for your doctor, dentist and local emergency services."

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